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ABSTRACT

The concept of andragogy is posited on four key assumptions about adult learners that distinguish them from child learners and that thus abrogate the premises upon which traditional pedagogy is based. In traditional pedagogy, the role of the learner is one of dependency. Andragogy, on the other hand, recognizes the deep psychological need of adults to be self-directing, and the andragogical model encourages teachers to nurture and encourages learners' natural maturation toward independence. The second postulate on which andragogy is based is that of the valued role of the learner's experience. This accumulated experience makes adult learners capable of peer helping and learning and thus makes group teaching methods better suited for adult learners than are passive information transmittal techniques. The third assumption is that of adults' readiness to learn, and the fourth is that of their psychological orientation to learning. In view of these assumptions, adult educators should use techniques to accelerate their students' readiness to learn, including self-appraisal, career counseling, and simulation. (An annotated bibliography of 20 items is included.) (MN)

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Working With the Adult Learner:
Applied Andragogy for Developmental Programs

By Robert L. Somers

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INTRODUCTION

While members of the profession frequently are given to quibbling over definitions of the various descriptors used to characterize our business—e.g., "compensatory," "developmental," "learning assistance," and "remedial"—the fact remains that our specialty is a subfield of adult education. Inasmuch as the majority of practitioners in the field are either content area experts who have little or no training in educational methods, or have training in methods more appropriate for children and adolescents, a thorough grounding in the theory and practice of adult education is an essential requisite for successful and informed practice in the profession.

Consequently, this article is devoted to working with the adult learner. It introduces some of the key concepts undergirding the practice of adult education and how it differs from the more traditional practices associated with the teaching of children. More specifically, this unit presents *andragogy* as the name given to our consolidated knowledge about adult development which justifies our treating adult learners as adults. In examining this concept—which encapsulates the notion of the art and science of helping adults learn—andragogy is defined not only in terms of what it is, but also in terms of what it is not, i.e., how it stands in sharp contrast to *pedagogy*, which is of course the business of teaching children. Given this theoretical framework, practitioners ideally will be persuaded to adjust their daily practice for congruence with andragogical principles. To that end, this article also suggests practical applications.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

In the beginning, there was the word—and the word was *pedagogy*. (My apologies to *The Book of John*.) Derived from the Greek roots *pais* ("boy") and *agogos* ("leader"), the term literally means one who leads, or teaches, children.

Pedagogy as both a concept and as an educational model first evolved in the monastic schools of Europe during the seventh century. Later, as secular schools and universities began emerging by the close of the 12th century, the notion came to describe a larger set of assumptions based on the observations of monks engaged in the teaching of somewhat more complex skills, such as reading and writing, to very young children and youths.

Largely through the efforts of missionaries, this tradition survived and was reinforced as elementary schools spread around the world during the 18th and 19th centuries. As late as the turn of this century, the model continued to be adopted and reinforced as educational psychologists began rudimentary attempts at the scientific study of the teaching-learning transaction. Unfortunately, most of these efforts focused on the reactions of children and animals to didactic teaching (read *conditioning*), thereby further enshrining the model.

AN ERA OF TRANSITION

This centuries-old, monolithic status quo might well be intact still were it not for the sweeping cultural changes accompanying the two world wars. During the postwar era, technological and social change potentiated each other. Consider, for example, the return home of thousands of GI's for schooling in new careers and the concomitant nascence of such ideals as universal higher education.

In any case, as systematic adult education programs began to be organized during this period, it came as no surprise that teachers in these programs began reporting problems with the assumptions and techniques of the pedagogical model. The more significant of these difficulties are outlined below.

Certainly, the most significant problem with pedagogy was, and remains, the static world view which nurtured it and upon which it is premised. In a relatively unchanging world, the purpose of classical education was the transmission of a finite body of knowledge and a limited number of skills which had stood the tests of time and the prevailing social order. Obviously, this definition of "education" can be legitimately operant only if the time span of major cultural change exceeds the life span of the individual. During such periods of relative stasis, the

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skills and knowledge acquired in one's youth can suffice a lifetime.

By contrast, late 19th-century and early 20th-century thinkers began to adopt a dynamic world view. In fact, they anticipated quite accurately the accelerating pace of cultural change that is accepted as a given today. Indeed, several cultural revolutions have occurred during this century alone. Consequently, the knowledge and skills obtained in youth might suffice for a mere decade rather than for a lifetime. Whitehead (pp. viii-xix) succinctly articulated one of the categorical imperatives of dynamism nearly 60 years ago when he observed:

> We are living in the first period of human history for which this assumption [stasis] is false...today this time-span [of major cultural change] is considerably shorter than that of human life, and accordingly our training must prepare individuals to face a novelty of [ever-changing] conditions.

It is not surprising then that by the turn of the 20th century, adult learners began to express frustration with the calcified, static world view and with its attendant pedagogical practices. Concurrently, their teachers began reporting that the characteristics and behavior of their "new" students did not seem to fit the assumptions attributed to learners by the pedagogical model.

As adults seemed more and more to resist fact-laden lectures, rote memorization, drill-and-practice, and the other baggage accompanying didacticism, the more informed and adventuresome of their teachers began experimenting with alternative assumptions and methods which frequently obtained better results. Ironically, during the decades from 1930 to 1950, the *Journal of Adult Education* is replete with articles by such teachers of adults who, acting on intuitive pragmatism, often succumbed to feelings of guilt and remorse in the face of their heightened successes. Grounded as they were in the principles of pedagogy, they failed to realize that what they lacked was not fidelity to "academic standards," but rather a unified and coherent theory to explain why, for example, they obtained better results with the interview as an assessment tool than with pen and paper examinations.

In essence, these early pioneers were beginning to shape a new definition of education compatible with the dynamic world view. Realizing on whatever level that it was no longer functional to define education merely as the transmission of what was known, they forsaw the need for skills to facilitate the lifelong process of continuing inquiry, i.e., learning how to learn independently. Thus, the didactic pedagogy of stasis began to give way to the continuing, self-directed inquiry of dynamism.

THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA

During the 1950's and 60's, in both Europe and in North America, the scholarship on adult learning made great strides as research about the phenomenon not only was consolidated, but also supplemented by complementary knowledge from related disciplines such as anthropology, gerontology, and sociology. Of particular impact was the emergence of a new subfield in developmental psychology, the life span group, who began investigating the neglected realm of development between adolescence and the declining years. (Havinghurst, 1970; Levinson, 1978; Knowles, 1980.)

Knowles' first book, *Informal Adult Education*, (1950) was a compendium of successful practices used by adult educators; it did not, however, attempt to synthesize these approaches into a coherent and unifying theory of adult education. It later fell to Cyril Houle to produce the seminal work on the internal process of adult learning in *The Inquiring Mind* (1961) which first suggested clearly discernible categories of adult learners based upon their motivational behaviors. Subsequently, Allen Tough, a former student of Houle's, extended this line of investigation in *Learning Without A Teacher* (1967) and again in *The Adult's Learning Projects* (1971), both of which focused upon how adults learn naturally, i.e., when they are not being "taught."

As this process of consolidation gathered momentum, European adult educators felt the need to name the emerging theoretical model in order to distinguish it from pedagogy. While they are responsible for both originally coining and subsequently resurrecting the term *andragogy*, Knowles (1968) is responsible for first introducing it into the literature on this continent. (Knowles, 1980, p. 42 and pp. 252-254; and Knowles, 1984, pp. 49-52.)

Then, two years later and after two decades of work, Knowles (1970) succeeded in producing the seminal work on andragogy that established it as a discrete and unified theory. While the tenets of this theory have not changed substantially, at this juncture it is important to note the shift in emphasis for its application as reflected in the subtitles of his works over three decades—"Androgogy [sic], Not Pedagogy" (1968); "Andragogy versus Pedagogy," (1970); and "From Pedagogy to Andragogy" (1980).

In the author's own words (1980, p. 43):

> Originally, I defined andragogy...in contrast to pedagogy...I am now at the point of seeing that andragogy is simply another model of assumptions about learners to be used alongside the pedagogical model...Furthermore, the models are probably most useful when not seen as dichotomous but rather as two ends of a spectrum, with a realistic assumption in a given situation falling in-between the two ends.

To fully appreciate that andragogy is an established field, yet in a dynamic state of flux, one only need consider the effects of its ethos on subsequent developments. Kidd (p. 23) was quick to point out that "mathetics" is a term that has come into currency among researchers in the U.S., the U.S.S.R., and other European countries to denote the transition in emphasis from teaching to learning. Mathetics, according to UNESCO (1972), is "the Science [sic] of the pupil's behavior while learning just as pedagogy is the discipline in which attention is focussed on the schoolmaster's behavior while teaching." Kidd concludes (p. 156) that, as in the case of andragogy before it, another "distinction of mathetics [that sets it apart from pedagogy] is that all relevant disciplines...that have anything to say about learning theory are utilized."

ANDRAGOGY AND PEDAGOGY COMPARED

The concept of andragogy is posited on four key assumptions about the adult learner which distinguish him from the child as a learner and which thus abrogate the premises upon

which traditional pedagogy is premised. (Kidd, 1973, Chapters 1, 2, 6, & 11; Knowles, 1980, Chapter 4; Knowles, 1984, Chapter 3; & Smith, 1982, Chapter 3.) In comparing and contrasting the applied workings of each model, the practitioner would be well advised to maintain the larger perspective of the theorist as well:

> The andragogical model, as I see it, is not an ideology; it is a system of alternative sets of assumptions. And this leads us to the critical difference between the two models. The pedagogical model is an ideological model which excludes the andragogical assumptions. The andragogical model is a system of assumptions which includes the pedagogical assumptions. (Knowles, 1984, p. 62.)

Assumption One—The Concept of the Learner

In traditional pedagogy, the role of the learner is one of dependency; societal expectations put the responsibility for what is to be learned, when and how it is to be learned, and whether it was learned squarely upon the teacher. Recognizing the deep psychological need of the adult to be self-directing, the andragogical model encourages the teacher to nurture and encourage the learner's natural maturation toward independence and the consequent assumption of mutual responsibility for his own learning.

In practical terms, this process includes techniques for removing the physical symbols of childishness and dependence from the physical environment while adding the symbols of maturation and self-determination to the psychic environment. In the former case, the learning environment should more resemble a living room than a high school with ashtrays. In the later case, the use of mutually negotiated learning contracts—the key elements of which are: 1) clearly stated objectives; 2) a variety of active learning experiences from which the learner may choose; and 3) opportunities to perform self-assessment and reassessment of progress toward course objectives—reinforces a climate of mutual respect between teacher and learner and encourages an attitude of self-direction in the learner.

Assumption Two—The Valued Role of the Learner's Experience

The child's experience is of little value to himself, much less to others, as a learning resource. The adult, on the other hand, has accumulated a rich well of experience to draw upon as a learning resource for both himself, and for others. Indeed, the bulk of experience from which the child benefits is not his own but rather that of the teacher, the author of the textbook, the film producer, and other such "experts." In short, the child's identity is primarily derived from significant others while the adult ego is comprised of his collected experience, i.e., what he has done for himself.

To accommodate these differences, it is essential for the adult educator to provide experientially based and proactive learning opportunities. In contrast to the rather passive techniques of transmittal—assigned readings, lectures, and "canned" audio-visual presentations—competent practice with adults makes maximum use of techniques such as case studies, simulation exercises, field experiences, and group discussion. Moreover, owing to their life experiences, adults are more capable of peer helping and peer learning. Because these processes ego-involve the adult, such opportunities for learning in groups are most valuable and therefore should not be regarded as "cheating."

Assumption Three—Readiness to Learn

Rousseau was precisely and inexorably correct when he identified and described the crucial role of the principle of utility in that mishmash of subsequent philosophy that today is euphemistically inflicted upon the unsuspecting in colleges of education as "learning theory." Would that three intervening centuries of teacher-centered "research" had not intervened and spoiled a good thing before contemporary thinkers like Chickering (1976), Havinghurst (1956 & 1970), and Levinson (1978) were able to help revive the theme! Modern scholarly opinion has come to recognize the developmental phases of adulthood just as previous work concentrated on the development of children and adolescents. Today, there is no question that, with both children and adults, Rousseau's principle of utility helps to impel the readiness to learn which, taken at its height, presents the "teachable moment."

Admittedly, these phenomena occur for different reasons within each group. Children and youth face developmental tasks which result primarily from the processes of physiological and mental maturation; adults, however, face developmental tasks resulting primarily from changes in, or additions to, their social roles. Consider, for example, that the typical composition teacher may not care a proverbial fig about organizational development or program evaluation, but let him or her be appointed director of the entire learning lab and watch the ensuing scramble!

Consequently, the timing of adult learning experiences ideally must be derived from a consideration of the principle of utility—and its attendant teachable moment—in terms of the adult's readiness to learn, rather than from the indigenous logic of the content area or the convenience of the sponsoring institution. Instead of assuming that all adult learners are always ready to confront the same task at the same time, the competent practitioner appropriately groups his learners into homogeneous or heterogeneous groups according to the objectives of the learners. As a group, all beginning ESL learners in a college might wish to acquire the basic vocabularly for correctly attending to the social amenities, yet subgroups of that same constituency might also like to begin learning job-specific terminology along with native English speakers enrolled in the same degree or diploma program.

In any case, it is not necessary to wait for the emergence of the teachable moment with adult students. The skilled practitioner knows how to accelerate the readiness to learn by the judicious use of techniques such as self-appraisal, career counseling, simulation exercises, and the provision of models of superior performance. In contrast to children, whose need to learn is primarily external and defined by societal expectations, adults have an internal "need to know" defined by their own realization of the potential benefits of learning compared to the negative consequences of not learning.

Assumption Four—Psychological Orientation to Learning

Children and adults approach learning experiences with sharply divergent orientations in terms of their respective views

of time. Similarly, the factors that motivate their learning tend to be equally divergent as are their loci of control. Children and youth are conditioned to a perspective of postponed application: learn arithmetic in grade school to be able to do algebra and trig in high school in preparation for the calculus in college. Given this orientation, children see learning as process of accumulating reservoirs of subject matter that might be useful in later life. Thus, this lock-step transmittal process engenders in them a *subject-centered* frame of reference toward their educational activities, wherein their motivators tend primarily toward congruence with their external locus of control—e.g., teacher and parental approbation, good grades now for a good job later.

Adults, however, bring a sense of urgency to their educational pursuits. They tend to view learning as a process for improving their coping skills *now* vis-a-vis the problems they face in their daily life situations. Consequently, their frame of reference toward learning is *problem-centered* and *task-oriented* because their motivation, like their locus of control, is primarily internal—e.g., increased job satisfaction, quality of life, and self-esteem.

These theoretical differences in the psychological orientation of children and adults to learning impel real-world consequences for competent practitioners of adult education. Rather than being concerned with the logical development of subject matter and its smooth articulation from grade to grade, adult educators, in their design and delivery of learning experiences, need to more attuned to the existential concerns of mature, task-oriented individuals. In place of the traditional lock-step courses in grammar and rhetoric, the adult curriculum ideally should be based on modules or program areas with titles like "Effective Writing for the World of Work."

SUMMARY

Kidd has asserted that, "The main source of good theory is good practice, and that the best theory is a distillation of practice" (p. 150). While this article, of necessity, is not the most expansive possible treatment of the theory and practice of andragogy, it does meet Kidd's criteria in that it demonstrates how practice helped to change centuries-old theory, and how the best of theory has drawn on over five decades of model practice. Similarly, it should be clear that far from being over, this complementary process of the evolution of both theory and practice will be relevant and on-going for the foreseeable future as America moves from its "greening" to its "greying" and as the momentum of cultural change accelerates faster still.

In all likelihood, the major impending advances will derive from the application of andragogical principles to youth education and from research into the physio-chemical mechanisms at work inside learners of all ages. Even though these speculative contingencies are exciting to contemplate, the indisputable fact remains that andragogy is a dynamic system appropriate for a world in flux.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CONSULTED

Chickering, A.W. (1976). *Education and identity*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

A foundational work on the developmental stages of young adults, this volume details Chickering's seven-vector theory and his six "conditions of impact." Of chief significance is the notion that development is neither a uniform nor a sequential, lock-step process.

Faure, E. et al. (1972). *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO's most prestigious book on education explicates the notion of lifelong learning. Its emphasis on learning to learn advocates the development of skills of inquiry as a primary goal of youth education.

Havinghurst, R.J., & Orr, B. (1956). *Adult education and adult needs*. Boston: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults.

This foundational work was among the first to point out that adulthood, with its transition points and crises, should be considered a developmental period in the same sense as childhood and adolescence.

Havinghurst, R.J. (1970). *Developmental tasks and education*. (2nd ed.). New York: David McKay.

Originally published in 1961, this work identified three stages of adulthood and, consequently, helped establish adult development as a specialty in developmental psychology.

Houle, C.O. (1961). *The enquiring mind*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

Based on interviews with 22 continuing adult learners, this volume contains the research findings from a scientifically designed, seminal study on the internal process of adult learning. Houle identified three types of adult learners—the goal-oriented, the activity-oriented, and the learning-oriented.

Kidd, J.R. (1973). *How adults learn*. New York: Cambridge.

First published in 1959 as a handbook for the practitioner, this work has served as a classic textbook in university graduate programs for almost three decades. Treating adult development in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, it contains exhaustive examinations of learning and motivation theories as well as applied topics such as curriculum, fields of practice, and the teacher as learner.

Knowles, M.S. (1968). "Adrogogy, not pedagogy." *Adult Leadership.* April.
Please note the mispelling of the term prior to the intervention of professional lexicographers.

Knowles, M.S. (1975). *Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers.* New York: Cambridge.
A compendium of practical advice and resources, this little two-part volume is addressed to both learners and teachers. Part one is designed to assist learners with increasing their skills of self-directed inquiry whilie part of two treats the techniques of facilitation and helping skills.

Knowles, M.S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy.* New York: Cambridge.
The revised and updated edition of Knowles' 1970 seminal work in which he developed the unified theory of andragogy, this edition, like its predecessor, continues to be the definitive work for both students and practitioners.

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First published in 1973 as a dissemination piece for applied andragogy, this work contains a consummate scholarly treatment of learning theory and group process.

Knowles, M.S. (1986). *Using learning contracts.* San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
This volume is a "how-to" guide extolling the benefits of contract learning. It provides copious examples from both academic and industrial settings.

Knox, A.B. (1977). *Adult development and learning.* San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
A comprehensive overview of research into adult development and adult learning, this hefty volume synthesizes more than 1,000 studies examining the effects of age, occupation, health, and scores of other variables related to learning by adults.

Levinson, D.J. (1978). *The seasons of a man's life.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
The work is the research base behind Gail Sheehy's 1976 best-seller, *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life.* After his former graduate student beat him to print, the professor sued her for $3.5 million in damages.

Rogers, C.R. (1983). *Freedom to learn for the 80's.* Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill.
An update of the author's 1963 classic, *Freedom to Learn*, this volume contains more powerful advocacy for learner-centered treatment of the "invisible curriculum."

Smith, R.M. (1982). *Learning how to learn: Applied theory for adults.* New York: Cambridge.
Organized into three sections, this work begins with an examination of learning theory as it applies to the concept of learning how to learn. The second part presents practical tips on this key concept for learners in various modes and settings. The final section of the book is a teacher-training resource complete with training exercises for those wishing to help others learn how to learn. *This volume is worth the price for its extensive treatment of learning and teaching styles instruments.*

Somers, R.L., Knowles, M. S., & Kerstiens, G. (1987). *The adult learner* [Videotape]. Boone, NC: The Telementoring Project, Reich College of Education, Appalachian State University.
This videotape begins by introducing viewers to the theory of andragogy and how it differs from pedagogy. The producer and his guests then share anecdotal tips for applying andragogy in the classroom and learning center.

Somers, R.L. (1988). *Understanding and working with the adult learner.* Boone, NC: The Telementoring Project, Reich College of Education, Appalachian State University.
This FIPSE-funded study guide was written to accompany *The Adult Learner* videotape. It is the original and larger work from which this issue of *RRiDE* was extracted.

Tough, A. (1967). *Learning without a teacher.* Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
This research summary—and its companion piece—extended the line of inquiry and expanded the methodologies first used by Houle. Significant among the findings were the fact that adults on the average engaged in eight self-directed learning projects or activities per year, that they undertook a similar sequence of steps in so doing, and that they reported obtaining more and better help from facilitators who had not been trained as teachers, i.e., pedagogues.

Tough, A. (1979). *The adult's learning projects.* (2nd ed.). Austin, TX: Learning Concepts.
This research report is the companion to *Learning Without a Teacher*; it originally appeared in 1971.

Whitehead, A. (1931). "Introduction." *Business adrift.* New York: McGraw-Hill.
One of Whitehead's more powerful philosophical statements about the dilemma of the educational process—then and now—appeared almost 60 years ago in this work by Wallace B. Donham.

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Robert L. Somers is Director of Telementoring Services, National Center for Developmental Education, and contributing editor to *RRiDE* and the *Journal of Developmental Education*, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC.

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